EQUALITY COLORADO

The Equal Times

The Newsletter of Equality Colorado

stop · think · peace

Winter 1999
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Jean Dubofsky Receives Equality Colorado's 1999 Ally for Justice Award

The Ally for Justice Reception honors outstanding supporters of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities of Colorado. Each years recipient demonstrates an exceptional commitment to social and economic justice issues for LGBT Coloradans and allies. Previous recipients include Honorary Roy Romer (1997) and the Honorary David Skaggs (1998). On Thursday, October 21, 1999 at the William Havu Gallery, Equality Colorado was proud to honor Jean Dubofsky as this year's ally for justice.

Equality Colorado's executive director, Lori Girvan, (right) hands Jean Dubovsky (left) one of the two parts of her award that was donated by Blake Street Glass.

Jean's work transcends cultural, racial, religious, economic, sexual, and gender barriers. As the lead counsel for the appeal to the United States Supreme Court against the constitutionality of Amendment 2, Jean has vociferously and tirelessly defended LGBT citizens' constitutional rights to non-discrimination. Her work has had a national effect, but she will forever be appreciated by her friends and supporters in Colorado as unmatched in her integrity and commitment.

Nearly 100 invites honored Jean at this year's Ally for Justice Reception. The event sponsors include the law firm of Brownstein, Hyatt & Farber, P.C., United Airlines, Blake Street Glass, Coors Brewing Company, the Gill Foundation, the National Distributing Company, Three Tomatoes Catering, George L. Couzens, Sharon Minzer, Dr. Dean Prina and Darren Maddux.

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs Releases Their Third Annual Report on Partner Abuse

by Kevin Bourque

Partner abuse within the lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual (LGBT) community continues to be dramatically under-reported and services for this community profoundly underfunded, according to a recently released report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP).

In the third annual report on domestic violence in LGBT relationships, the NCAVP documented 2574 cases of partner abuse in 1998. The statistics in this report were gathered from nine regions in the United States, represented by NCAVP member agencies, including the statewide Anti-Violence Program of Equality Colorado.

NCAVP figures along with prevalence studies indicate that partner abuse in the LGBT community occurs at about the same rate as in heterosexual relationships (about 25%-33%). Slightly more gay male survivors (47%) reported abuse to NCAVP members than lesbians (36%). Almost equal rates were reported by bisexual (8%) and heterosexual (9%) survivors.

One particular concern addressed in the report is equal access to government funding sources for direct services, which are overwhelmingly focused on programs for heterosexual women and children. Virtually all domestic violence direct service programs are heavily reliant on funding such as the Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA) and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and consequently are subject to political and electoral changes. LGTB services, however, are particularly vulnerable to political whim in states (such as Colorado) which lack civil rights protections for LGTB people and do not in any way recognize same-gender relationships.

Strict gender-rigidity and gender segregation in most mainstream domestic violence programs has provided obstacles not only to members of the LGTB community who seek services, but also to the heterosexual men who are victims of domestic violence.

The models of outreach and service delivery used by some of the oldest and strongest NCAVP member programs -- New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles -- are suitable for dense urban areas, but are not as effective elsewhere. Programs based outside major metropolitan areas, such as the statewide program in Colorado, are looking for funding that will support the development of new models of service provision to a more dispersed LGTB community, including effective outreach and services to suburban and rural areas.

The report outlines five recommendations for improving domestic violence services to the LGTB community: to 1) expand funding for community-based specific domestic violence services; 2) develop and strengthen community-based services; 3) begin or expand community education and prevention efforts; 4) create legislative change; and 5) demand institutional change and accountability. Most of these could perhaps only happen after the first -- the expansion of funding; however (as states the report) "[h]eterosexist and rigid gender barriers…prevent LGTB services from being equally considered for funding and reinforc[e] the myth that domestic violence only occurs to heterosexual women" (5).

Perhaps a great deal of the problem -- and a major component of the obstacle we face in addressing it -- is the way many think about (and are taught to think about) domestic violence. There is a pre-existent myth both in our community and in society in general that: men cannot be victims and women cannot be perpetrators of domestic violence or partner abuse; and therefore that abuse cannot and does not happen within same-gender relationships. This myth (perhaps in addition to distrust of law enforcement and traditional domestic violence service providers) is what stands in the way of adequate reporting and, consequently, adequate funding for services directed towards our community.

As stated previously, partner abuse occurs in between one out of every three or one out of every four same-gender relationships. The most important thing we can do -- both as ourselves personally and as members of the lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual community -- is to confront the myth that partner abuse does not happen within our relationships, and to acknowledge and report partner abuse when it occurs. Talk to your friends, loved ones and co-workers about partner abuse in your community. Identify and take a stand against partner abuse when you see it happen or know it's happening. Support those members of our community who are victims: emotionally, materially, or in any other way in which they have need.

If you or someone you know is a victim or perpetrator of partner abuse, please contact the Anti-Violence Program of Colorado's twenty-four hour crisis line at (303) 852-5094 or (888) 557-4441.

Speak Your Mind, Make a Difference

by Kirsten Peterson

The Voices of Faith for Human Rights program is broadening its Outreach through the establishment of a Speakers Bureau. This new structure will equip a group of presenters with the information and skills to facilitate debate and understanding on human sexuality, civil rights and justice issues from various perspectives. Faith communities are increasingly expressing the need for help in addressing these and other issues of oppression in order to be vocal and powerful defenders of civil rights.

The Voices of Faith (VOF) program of Equality Colorado was established nearly seven years ago to support and encourage faith communities to stand against political and societal inequalities that LGBT people and others face. The program informs and empowers through training, information and outreach on the social and spiritual challenges uniquely facing LGBT people. The VOF approach – making connections between core spiritual values and LGBT issues – has proven a powerful way to open people's minds and to promote action.

The Speakers Bureau will be a natural extension of VOF's ongoing work in Colorado. It will be an opportunity to unite a community of diverse, well-informed presenters. These volunteers will share personal experiences, listen to others, and provide information regarding the oppression of people in faith communities and society by using a personal approach, volunteers will help people of faith to identify effective w to dismantle the causes of inequality and to follow their personal convictions through to action.

The VOF program will be promoting the new Speakers' Bureau across the diverse spectrum of faith communities in Colorado. Currently, nearly 130 faith communities throughout the state are supportive and affirming of their LGBT members. However, these communities are still in need of continued education, particularly concerning ways to advocate for and promote equal rights and justice. An even greater number of faith communities are becoming open to discussing civil rights issues that effect their LGBT members.

Volunteer speakers will be the heart and soul of this effort, and the project is currently recruiting volunteers from around the state, from all faith traditions and inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Volunteers need only an openness to sharing, listening and providing information to people not so different from themselves.

In order to develop effective speaker skills, we will begin training sessions in December. These sessions will give us an opportunity to identify, develop and practice effective presentation skills. After initial training sessions, there will be additional opportunities for in-service trainings and community activities.

If you would like to volunteer of have any suggestions for speaking engagements, please contact the Voices of Faith program at 303-839-5540 or outside of Denver at 1-888-557-4441. To access, additional resources, check out the Equality Colorado web page at www.equalitycolorado.org for the directory of supportive congregations, a LGBT faith bibliography, sermons and more.

Kirsten Peterson is the Voices of Faith Associate responsible for coordinating the Speakers Bureau. She comes to Equality Colorado as a full-time volunteer through the Urban Servants Corps, a Lutheran program that works in cooperations with community agencies to address immediate needs and to advocate for long-term social change.

We're Moving!

The word is out, and it is now official. Equality Colorado is moving its Denver office. Recent visitors to our office have wondered how the staff could function in a building that was being renovated and gutted.

Renovation of the building at 1245 E. Colfax began in the Spring. As anyone who has lived through a remodeling job knows, as soon as the renovations begin, so also do the problems.

And we have had many. Stifling hot and freezing cold temperatures (but never 'just right'). A complete absense of natural light and blinding sun. Wallless floors explosed to the streets below and shards of glass in our offices and entranceway. Floods and leaks. Thefts, phone disruptions and computer crashes. And toxic fumes that caused an emergency evacuation of staff and ongoing office shutdowns.

As with Moses, these plagues have now guided us to a promised land. Or at least new offices. Later this month, Equality Colorado will move to new offices at 1600 Downing, Suite 650, still conveniently located in Capitol Hill. Our new 'digs' are spacious, bright and clean, and we look forward to welcomng visitors, clients and supporters into a truly professional office setting,

Our phone and fax numbers, mailing address and e-mail contacts will remain the same,, and we should have our phones up and running on December 1, 1999.

We need the help of many to make this move as affordable and convenient as possible. Tentative moving dates are between November 28 and December 4. We are looking for people to help pack and to move cartons, desks and office equipment out of our old space and into our new home. We are also looking for anyone who can supply a moving van or provide reduced rates. Lastly, we would welcome donations of quality used office furniture and office dividers. If you can supply Equality Colorado with labor or goods, please call Kevin Maly at Equality Colorado, 303-839-5540. All donations are tax-deductible.

The more things change . . .

Dede de Percin

Last week, in the last of the trials associated with the murder of Mathew Shepard, Aaron McKinney was sentenced to two life sentences, closing at least the criminal chapter of this heinous crime. And it was during the jury selection process for McKinney's trial less than a month ago, that I received a call from the relative of another gay man in Wyoming who had been sexually assaulted and beaten with a baseball bat. That's when it really occurred to me how little some things have changed.

A year after Mathew Shepard's murder, there is still nothing in place to help the victims of bias-motivated violence in Wyoming. I am angry that the closest place his sister could turn to for help is in Denver, and frustrated that there was so little I could do for them. It seems unbelievable that all the media focus, all the frenzy, all the fundraisers haven't had any significant effect when it comes to direct services.

Direct services is may ax to grind, my soapbox, my obsession. Advocacy groups, policy think tanks, and research institutes are all important to our movement, but they work at the general level, not the specific. Direct services provide crisis intervention, referrals for counseling and community resources, and case management. Advocacy groups, policy think tanks, and research institutes are not the organizations that make sure someone is available 24 hours a day to LGBT people in crisis.

I'm not just talking about Wyoming, because the parallels to Colorado (and elsewhere in the country) are precise. Heightened awareness about the consequences of unchecked harassment, threats, intimidation, and assault of people even perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, has remained on a very theoretical plane.

I'm determined to be idealistically optimistic that my frustration over what has stubbornly stayed the same can be a catalyst to demand change. My vision for the future of our community is a simple one: that LGBT people will live their lives free from discrimination, persecution, and violence. That we have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as our heterosexual counterparts.

In the meantime, I want to make certain that when a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender victim of violence asks for help, someone is there every time. There shouldn't be any phones, like there still are in Wyoming that ring and ring with no one to answer.

Director's Cut

by Lori Girvan

They are everywhere. At least it seemed that way to me as I returned to Denver to live after a 15 year hiatus. You know. Those telltale Rainbow Flags in store windows that declare, "We welcome you." (That means me!)

As a teenager, the only gay-friendly environments I saw were the bars I sneaked into with a fake ID. (More confessions that won't get me elected to high office.) They were a social lifeline for a closeted community. It is gratifying to see recognition that we are a consumer market worth courting and that we are a vibrant and significant part of the Colorado business community and the economic growth of the state. In addition to various directories, resource guides and a Denver map, we now boast the Colorado Business Council, a chamber of commerce of nearly 200 members from small businesses, individual companies and large corporations. There are also sector-specific and regional associations such as the Colorado Lesbian and Gay Bar Association and NetCoRe, a network of gay-friendly businesses in Colorado Springs.

Recently, I have realized that in some stores, the Rainbow Flag is just a sticker, as easy to peel off as it is to stick on the window. It means, "We want your dollars." I am not especially welcome, nor am I in a safe and supportive environment. Could I really hold the hand of another woman in this restaurant? Will we get the same service if we are two mommies buying these baby clothes? Or if I am with a woman of color? Or if I am transgender?

And, of course, these stickers are not, in fact, everywhere. They are in Denver -- Capitol Hill to be precise. It is a rare surprise to see this expression of pride around the state or even in the suburbs. A colleague recently told me of his delight at seeing a Rainbow flag at a small, rural garage. For me, outside of Denver is where the affirmation actually resonates with meaning; in many Colorado towns, that flag is an act of courage and a signpost to an oasis of acceptance.

I have also noticed that some store branches that recognize and court us in 'our' neighborhood, do not have the same awareness and welcoming attitude towards LGBT clientele in their suburban and non-Denver branches. These telltale differences suggest that being gay-friendly is not always a company-wide policy but a localized strategy or the result of who the employees happen to be - queer.

So what does it mean to be gay-friendly? Providing safe environments that welcome us as consumers is indeed an important first step. I will add here that we the LGBT consumers do not do our fair share. Do we rent videos or shop at discount stores that we know have rejected non-discrimination just because it is more convenient or fifty cents cheaper? Some of us cut costs to stay within our budgets and support children, parents and partners; however, many others of us spend our dollars without thinking about what kinds of policies the company has or how it uses its profits. I urge you to support those businesses that have demonstrated respect for us as consumers, instituted favorable employment policies and supported our organizations and events.

Ultimately, however, I believe that to be gay-friendly, a business must move beyond merely letting us through the door to serving as an advocate and example for equality. It is time for the business community in Colorado to fulfill its role and responsibility as a voice for civil rights and inclusion.

The long-term effects of our failure to recognize our queer citizens will undermine the economic viability and social well-being of our state. Creative, forward-looking companies that choose to locate or move to other states that take stands against discrimination. Colorado's failure to attract entrepreneurs and employees who are the best and the brightest – of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities. Dynamic teachers around the state who move to school districts that recognize and support their LGBT and questioning students. Talented people who decide that beautiful scenery is just not a substitute for tolerance, respect and safety.

Therefore, EVERY store, company and corporation has a critical stake in being an ally and supporting equal rights for all. I would like to see a time when the Rainbow Flag sticker is a guarantee that a company does one or more of the following:

Contribute to LGBT organizations: Our events and work is already supported by the financial and in-kind contributions of businesses. Some businesses have established philanthropic funds or departments to develop further their capability to contribute to community development. A notable example of this form of support to LGBT organizations is the Gill Foundation. Of note are approaches such as corporate matches, employee giving programs and incentives to employees who volunteer at non-profit organizations.

More can be done. The pool of businesses willing to contribute financial and other resources must be expanded, including enterprises around the state. Companies must no longer shy away from supporting 'political' work to end discrimination and secure rights. We as employees can try to shape our companies charitable guidelines and acknowledge their support of causes that improve our lives.

Advertise in LGBT publications: This issue of The Equal Times marks the start of our efforts to expand advertising. (Ready for my shameless pitch?). Advertising is an opportunity for the business community and non-profit partners to publicly show their support for the mission of the organization.

Adopt non-discrimination policies and practices: A non-discrimination policy is not a token statement; rather, it is a declaration that your business is committed to providing a positive work environment and will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Businesses are often the first to adopt non-discrimination policies and practices and they serve as valuable testing grounds for demonstrating the value and effectiveness of non-discrimination efforts in the workplace.

Recognize our partnerships and families: Here again, it is the business community that has shown local and state governments that domestic partner benefits and support to LGBT families are essential to employee well-being and productiveness, and that they are not heavy in costs and administration.

Take a public stand: This step is, in my view, one of the most important, but rarely taken We need to hear the voices of the business community during testimony at the legislature and in public debates in the media and other platforms. Our elected decision-makers will listen when a business leader, whether a CEO or a small business owner, states that equal rights for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are good for business and good for our state.

Through these efforts, maybe our symbol of pride can start to become a true symbol of change.

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The Equal Times is the newsletter of Equality Colorado. Equality Colorado's mission is to work to secure equality and justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Equality Colorado seeks to create an environment where people are respected, open dialogue is encouraged and the truth is spoken about the diversity of our families and sexual identities.

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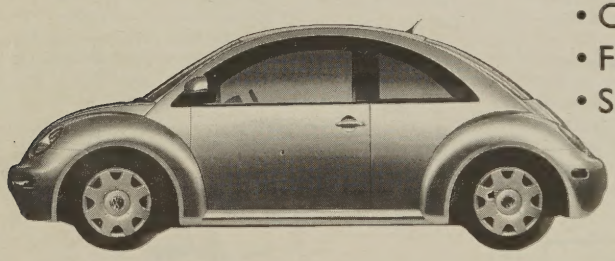

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Community Organizing in 2000

by Nick Sarchet

When I look towards the year 2000, I see many challenges ahead for those of us involved in the struggle for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equal rights. Fortunately, with all challenges come opportunities. We have the opportunity to come together not only as a community, but as a political force to be reckoned with.

The LGBT and allied community in Colorado has an enormous wealth of resources and expertise. Equality Colorado plans to continue the ongoing work of educating our state legislators and encouraging them to sponsor and support bills that promote equality for ALL of Colorado's residents. However, the truth remains that we cannot do it alone. It takes every single person who has a stake in the movement for equality and justice to do his or her part.

As a community organizer, my vision for Equality Colorado's future is based in the belief that it is our responsibility to be a part of a truly broad-based social justice movement. This means being intentional and consistent in addressing all forms of oppression, not just those based in heterosexism and genderism. In addition, I believe that it is Equality Colorado's task to build and empower leaders locally, across the entire state, coming together to become a force for change in the many different communities to which we belong. In order to effect this change we must understand the specific issues, set realistic short and long term goals and, perhaps more importantly, develop effective strategies for mobilizing both locally and on a statewide basis.

I foresee that one of my greatest challenges as a community organizer is in building power among our broad membership base. Our constituency is a very diverse group of people – allies, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender; many races; different religious backgrounds; etc. Our work centers on issues that effect our constituents on a very personal level. Community organizing is so important to our movement because it is based on the idea that real change occurs when people take responsibility for – and take control of – the institutions that affect their lives. It is about having a voice in the many circles of our lives: our schools, workplaces, families, and community organizations. Moreover, it is about building that voice in a systematic, deliberate way.

My conception of community organizing is four part. First, there is the need to build power through involving the constituency in prioritizing problems and identifying solutions to those problems. Secondly, we must identify the individuals, organizations, and the structures that can make those solutions possible. We must then must engage these stakeholders in the process. Lastly, we need to empower and develop the capacity of our leaders to take on the many issues that reflect the goals and aspirations of our diverse community.

Community organizing is not a technique for problem solving. I do not believe it should be merely as a process that is good for its own sake. Unless an organization wins concrete, measurable benefits for those who participate, it will not be able to sustain itself. People want to see results. They usually join a struggle if two things are true. First, they must see a potential for either benefit or harm to themselves if the group succeeds or fails. Second, they must see that their personal involvement has an overall impact on the effort.

It seem to me that those of us who have a stake in working for broad based social justice sometimes lose sight of the progress we have made and the importance of each and every individual's contributions to the movement. It is not necessary to have a nationally recognized name, or donate hundreds or thousands of dollars, or to spend every moment of free time as an activist. The people who lick envelopes once a month, the people who attend a rally or community event, the people who send a letter to their legislator, the people who sign a petition - these are the people crucial to a successful movement.

This past year we have moved both the Civil Rights Bill and the Hate Crimes Bill farther along in the legislative process then ever before. Our Anti-Violence posters are in many schools across the state. Local ordinances are being debated in many communities, including a Domestic Partnership Registry (Denver), adding gender variance to anti-discrimination laws (Boulder), and creating an anti-discrimination ordinance (Greeley).

Community-based organizations fighting for civil rights, an end to violence based on intolerance, and a voice in their communities have many struggles to face. we require strong organizations and leadership that can withstand the pressures of working for change. Building a strong statewide organization means more than finding a great staff person; more than building an active Board of Directors; more than raising lots of money; it is all these things and more. I believe we have what it takes to be a force for change, but as a community, we need to recommit ourselves to the fight. We need to reinvigorate a spirit of energy and openness. Equality Colorado has shown its ability to withstand conflict – both internal and external. We have shown that we have the power to endure.

Every action falls within a continuum of activism. The choices one makes as she or he walks through this world speak to unique values and priorities. Find the area on the continuum where you work best. This place is different for each person. Not everyone wants to lead a march on the Capitol or become a LGBT rights spokesperson, but everyone can do something.

By being a part Equality Colorado, you have taken the first step to affirming your commitment to the fight for equality. I would like each person who reads this to imagine a world where LGBT people are free from hate violence, employment and housing discrimination and are able to have their families and relationships openly welcomed and affirmed. We are not there yet! Please take a moment and recommit yourself to the fight. There are many ways, big and small, in which you can participate and support the work Equality Colorado is doing. Check out our volunteer/activist opportunities and make a commitment!

Equality Colorado Named a Beneficiary of the 23rd Annual Aspen Gay & Lesbian Ski Week

by Kristin Neil

Celebrate the millennium in style at the 23rd annual Aspen Gay and Lesbian Ski Week, the largest and longest running Gay and Lesbian winter event in the world, and support Equality at the same time on January 22-29, 2000! Over 4,000 LGBT people will descend on this mountain town for an unforgettable week of skiing, boarding, and socializing. Aspen Gay and Lesbian Community Fund (AGLCF) produces Gay & Lesbian Ski week to benefit organizations working on issues of gay and lesbian interests locally, regionally, and nationally. Other agencies that will benefit from the weeks events include Project Inform, SLDN, PFLAG, the Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer, CLIP, the Gender Identity Center, and Western Colorado AIDS Project, as well as various local human service organizations.

Come join other Ski Week participants on the designated mountain of the day and take over the slopes. Beginner skiing and snowboarding, special clinics, and group refresher lessons will be offered all through the week at special discounts so you can look your best on the mountain. Non-skiers won't be bored with nordic ski afternoons and lunches, ice skating, shopping and dining at some of the world's finest retailers and restaurants. Incredible Aprés Ski parties will bring everyone together at the end of each afternoon. In the evenings, don't miss our hilarious Comedy Night, Aspen Ballet Company performances, films, theater, live music, and of course, our non-stop fabulous dance parties.

Don't forget our women's weekend from January 22-26, with special dinner parties, Aprés Ski events, full day ski and snowboard clinics for all levels, cocktail parties, dance parties, and other great activities. Special package deals including four nights lodging, two full day ski/board clinics with equipment, an additional full day lift ticket, access to the dance parties, a day pass to the Aspen Club & Spa, and the Ski Week gift bag are available for as low as $750/person (based on double occupancy.)

Some of our favorite activities are of course back again. Our fourth annual, Coors Light Downhill Costume Competition, the most popular event of the week for Ski Week participants and Aspen visitors and locals, is not to be missed on Tuesday. An outrageous afternoon of costumes and regalia with prizes, dancing, laughter and fun that continues with the Aprés Ski and Tea Dance at the Tippler. Once you've warmed up on the slopes, scratch that competitive itch and join us for Sports Day at the Spider Sabich race arena on Wednesday. Strut your racing stuff, then feast on an afternoon BBQ. Following the race, get a taste of Election 2000 at our Human Rights Summit with candidates and elected officials from around the country. For those who missed the films last year, our United Airlines Film Festival is back, bringing you special gay and lesbian themed features throughout the week.

Full Week Registration is $175 and provides the following: entry to AGLCF sponsored dance parties (each night), including Sundays Opening party, Aprés Ski parties every day, a day pass to the Aspen Club & Spa, plus discounts on spa services, special pricing on Ski School classes, discounts on pre-purchased lift tickets, Ski Week gift bag with the official Ski Week t-shirt, gift items from sponsors, discounts at local retailers. Registration is limited, so act soon and take advantage of these discounts. Only up for the weekend? A three day weekend pass is available for $90. Passes are available through ACR or through our website at www.gayskiweek.com.

When you arrive, come to Registration at the St. Regis Hotel, 315 E. Dean St. and pick up your Ski Week badge and official program of events. You will also find additional information and sign ups for ski school clinics, the downhill costume competition, sports day races, and other activities. For lodging and transportation call our official tour company, Aspen Central Reservations at 888-298-8070. For more information, call 970.925.9249 or online at aspen-gay@rof.net. Hope to see you in Aspen!

Equality Colorado Thanks the Efforts of all the Following Volunteers:

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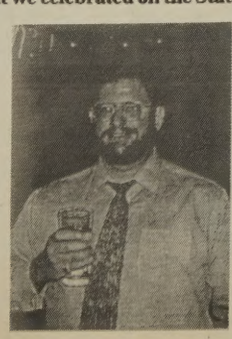
Thank You, Equality Colorado!!

Without your tenacity, integrity and leadership, we would lose the fight for freedom. I remember the night we celebrated on the State Capitol steps. Keep up the good work!

"We must conclude that Amendment 2 classifies homosexuals not to further a proper legislative end but to make them unequal to everyone else.
"This, Colorado will not do.
"A state cannot so deem a class of persons a stranger to its laws.

U.S. Supreme Court
May 20, 1996



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Speaking Together for Justice

by James D. Lynch, M.Div.,
Director, Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministries

Often, the State Capitol can be a lonely place for advocates and community organizers. Everyone is vying for increased budgets and programs and everyone wants to pull a legislator aside and get her or him to hear her or his side of the story. It's hard to know who to trust and who trusts you. So, when advocates and community organizers find common ground, they celebrate the opportunity to work together for justice.

As director of the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry - Colorado, I especially celebrate how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Equality Colorado work together for justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. Last session, the LOGM-Colorado and Equality Colorado joined together to support amending the state's civil rights code to include sexual orientation and to pass anti-hate crime legislation.

The Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry - Colorado (LOGM) is a state public policy office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The ELCA is a 5.2 million member denomination and has about 120 congregations in the state of Colorado. The LOGM-Colorado seeks to be a voice for persons living in poverty and persons without a voice in the political system.

As a faith community, the ELCA recognizes that many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons do not have a voice in the political system and experience discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations on a daily basis. Many of our members disagree about human sexuality and homosexuality in particular and we have committed ourselves to dialogue and discernment. Although we are a church still in dialogue, we recognize when our questions of discernment are also questions of justice.

As a church, we have committed ourselves through official church statements to be in "strong opposition to all forms of verbal or physical harassment or assault of persons because of their sexual orientation" and to "support legislation, referenda, and policies to protect the civil rights of all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, and to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, public services and accommodations." These statements enable me to stand in solidarity with Equality Colorado on these issues.

Last session, I gave public testimony in support of civil rights and anti-hate crime statutes. During the hearing on civil rights, a member of the House Judiciary Committee thanked me for my testimony and said, "it is a pleasure to hear a religious voice at the table speaking in support of this bill." Indeed, it was a pleasure, no an honor, to be at\ the table. The Lutheran church, other Christian denominations and other faith organizations need to come to the table and take a firm stand against discrimination and hate. No one should be denied their God-given and grace-filled right to freedom, dignity, and above all safety.

In January 2000, I will come again to the table and testify in support of civil rights and anti-hate crime statutes. I value the staff of Equality Colorado as trustworthy colleagues in public witness and service. Our trust and partnership continues to grow. By working together, we will help to dismantle power disparities, disavow hate, and model for others how to speak out together for justice.

Reporting from Southern Colorado

by Christy Pitts

As 1999 draws to a close, so does the first year of having a field office of Equality Colorado in Southern Colorado. This has been a year of discovery of how important Equality Colorado's message is throughout our state, of how involved and active the smaller communities in Southern Colorado are, and how discrimination is still alive and well no matter where we live.

This has been an amazing year here in Colorado Springs. Equality Colorado was the host of the first ever lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) sponsored candidates' forum during the city elections in April. All but two of the candidates showed up, spoke to the crowd, and stayed around for the opportunity to get to know all of us better. The first LGBT Voter Guide also went out during that same election. The Mayor of Colorado Springs, Mary Lou Makepeace, issued a proclamation at the end of August, recognizing that week as PrideFest.

In September, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute brought the semi-annual meeting of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable to Colorado Spring. John Paulk of Exodus and Will Perkins of Colorado for Family Values both showed up for public forum. The Roundtable was featured in the New York Times and depicted Colorado Springs as a progressive accepting community.

In February of 2000, Equality will be working with the Gill Foundation and other groups to organize a series of meetings in Colorado Springs. The goal will be to bring together different constituencies in Colorado Springs including LGBT organizations, allied organizations, socially active non-profits, community leaders, leaders of local art organizations, progressive companies, and other interested residents. These meetings will provide a forum to discuss visions for Colorado Springs and way to work together in different coalitions.

In August 2000, Equality is co-sponsoring the 25th Annual Conference on Men & Masculinity. This conference will be put on by NOMAS--The National Organization of Men Against Sexism. NOMAS is made up of men and women who are pro-feminist, anti-racist, gay-affirming, and working to enhance the lives of both men and women.. Watch the Equal Times for more information on this conference.

There is much to be done in Southern Colorado and Equality Colorado looks forward to working with our activists in the coming months to identify ways to strengthen our outreach and collaboration in this important region.

Farewell

by Christy Pitts

In mid-November I am finishing my work with Equality Colorado. This has been an amazing 11 months–thank you so much. I especially want to thank my Advisory Committee: David Sellon, Martha Ludwig, Shean Belle, Ron Eby, John Hazelhurst, Patrick Rios, & Russ A. I am so fortunate to have had the chance to work with all of you. I am looking forward to continuing to work with you here in Colorado Springs.

Between Sunday Belief and Monday Morning Practice

by the Rev. Karen Sorensen, Pastor, Christ Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Pueblo, CO

There are those who say that our outlook and expectations of life are shaped in great measure by the culture, politics, and personal life we experience during our adolescence. Upon reflection, I have found much truth vis a vis the perspectives and people who molded my life during those years. Graduating from high school in 1971 place me in a time when everything traditional was being questioned. The touchstone people in my life were from a youth group in a very outspoken and prophetic-minded church. My closest friend was a gay male (although neither he nor I had any real sense of orientation at the time). The pastor who in those years encouraged me to enter the ministry was and remains a person with a passion for justice for all people. Even though I had never heard a woman preach or met a woman pastor, it always seemed that God would gift us in the ways we could best open life for others, regardless of our gender or orientations. Twenty years ago at my Ordination, this pastor charged me to preach with a newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.

I relate this piece of my journey as a witness to the power of a faith community to positively shape individual lives and be a voice for equality, especially for the young people in our midst. How we live and witness today shapes their vision and hopes for a meaning-filled life.

I remember attending a workshop 20 years ago, when I was a seminarian, on domestic violence; at the time, it was for me a real eye-opener. Upon returning to the church where I served, I preached and prayed about the hidden shame of victims and their households, that God did not will or condone their anguish and pain. Within days, at least seven women from that congregation came thanking me in tears because these words were a sign that perhaps God cared about their confusing lives, and now, they had the courage to seek some help. I have seen the same kind of empowerment for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, their parents, and their families when the church dares to speak real truth about the holiness of ALL people's lives, when the church dares to strip away the layers of hatred and suspicion in which many scriptures have been entombed. Religious communities then can become the sanctuaries they were intended to be, giving us the strength to live our "Sunday commitments to dignity" in the Mondays and Tuesdays of our workplaces and our schools.

At the national gathering this past summer of my denomination, the United Church of Christ, there was resounding support for recognizing the silence and lack of understanding around youth suicide, particularly as it touches the lives of LGBT and questioning youth. As a church, we have been called to education, action, and advocacy on behalf of the lives of the youth entrusted to our care.

Over the last then years in Pueblo, our congregation has had the courage to take a stand, to self-define as it were as a faith community that welcomes all people. This we see modeled in the ministry of Jesus and the people with whom he chose to associate, as well as the concerns of the Prophets in the Hebrew scriptures. Our identity also comes forth from our life experiences with members of the church who have come out, raised children, coped with various disabilities, lived and sometimes died valiantly with HIV/AIDS. These literally are our brothers, sisters, children, and friends. If God names us "beloved daughter or son" at our Baptism, who are we to do anything less than cherish one another along life's way?

Formally, the congregation I serve is "Congregation #182" of over 300 congregations in the nation that have declared themselves to be "Open and Affirming," and our ad every week in the local newspapers names us as "An Inclusive Christian Community." Let anyone interpret that as they well. We are constantly challenging ourselves to be inclusive in the names we use for God and for ourselves, in using music from many cultures, and in reminding ourselves that our building still remains less than fully accessible.

When Jesus was being tested by both pro- and anti-Roman forces on the question of paying taxes to Emperor Caesar, he asked his adversaries to identify the image on the coin commonly used for paying the tax. The coin bore the likeness of the Emperor. But we bear the likeness and image of God. Jesus left the crowd in a place of ambiguity. Yes, we are obligated to pay taxes with this coinage, but our first obligation is to give to God what is God's – our wholes selves, with all our struggles, joys, and sorrows. In other words, we cannot belong to God only on Sunday and to the Caesars of life the other six days of the week. If you and I are created in the image of God and named "Beloved," then these the lenses which give focus to our lives and to the call to be an unabashedly open community of faith. At stake, particularly, are the lives of the youth and children around us who look to us to live courageously and with imagination. Let us then boldly live in the conviction that ALL of our lives are a precious gift from God.

Christ Congregational Church in Pueblo is one of the over 80 faith communities in Colorado that are supportive of full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of their assemblies and that are partners with Equality Colorado in working to secure equality and justice for all people. . . no exceptions.

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POINT COUNTER-POINT

Wanted: Opinions

by Lori Girvan

In the September 1999 issue of The Equal Times, Voices of Faith Director Kevin Maly wrote a personal commentary to reconsider the tenets of our struggle to secure marriage rights for LGBT people. Equality Colorado notes that this piece should have been clearly framed as a personal commentary; it had the appearance of a factual analysis. Nevertheless, I have been delighted by the strong reactions – both negative and positive to this piece.

The fact that so many readers wanted to share their opinions has revealed the need for a regular platform for lively debate on issues that affect our lives. All too often, people – queer and nonqueer alike – make assumptions that a particular view is held by every LGBT person. We are, of course, as diverse politically as we are culturally, socially and economically. Therefore, over the coming months, Equality Colorado will revise The Equal Times to include the following features and columns in order to increase the participation of our readers in key debates:

Letters to the Editor: Do you disagree with us? Feel like we missed an important issue? Write to us. Letters can be no more than 200 words, and we reserve the right to edit. Please include your name and contact information, but note if you would like your name withheld. We will not publish hateful, inflammatory letters but those that contribute to debate and understanding.

Point/counterpoints: We believe it is important to look at all sides of an issue and therefore will encourage point/counterpoints on debates related to LGBT issues and rights as well as other decisions and policies that concern us as citizens. This edition begins this feature with commentaries for and against the death penalty – a debate re-ignited by the recent trial for the murder of Matthew Shepard. Please keep in mind that printing an opinion in no way reflects the views of Equality Colorado as an organization

Guest columnists: Just as I get to spout my views in the Director's Cut, we will welcome columns from Equality activists that raise pertinent questions and analyze topical issues in a new and challenging way.

Please send us your ideas for debates that you would like to see addressed in these pages. Of course, not everything needs to spark controversy. We ALWAYS welcome articles that can bring the work our readers are doing to a larger audience. We look forward to hearing from you.

Anti-Death Penalty

by David Coldiron

When I first heard the news about the brutal slaying of Matthew Shepard, one of the many thoughts that raced through my mind is, ``I wonder if they'll give whoever did this the death penalty?" It's no secret that gays and lesbians are second-class citizens under the law in many respects - the state denies us the right to marry, to serve in the military, and often, to inherit property or be protected from employment discrimination. Why would I expect the killers of Matthew Shepard to be punished as severely as they would be if they had killed a straight person?

But as my thoughts evolved over the ensuing months, I began to turn to the question of whether it would be wise to execute Shepard's killers. Surely Henderson and McKinney are despicable pieces of human trash, hardly worthy of anything but the slightest of sympathies for childhoods and circumstances that perhaps set the stage for their ultimate crime. Repugnant though they are, Henderson and McKinney, I don't think responding to their repugnance and violence with yet more violence is the answer.

For starters, there are two very real problems with the death penalty as a matter of public policy. First, it is well-documented that the death penalty is applied unevenly, depending upon one's race. 42 percent of death row inmates are black, while only 15 percent of the U.S. population is African-American. In recent years, 10 whites have been executed for the murder of blacks; 137 blacks have been executed for killing whites (according to the Death Penalty Information Center.) For a host of reasons, including racism and the lack of adequate legal representation, blacks are far more likely to receive a death sentence than whites.

Second, innocent people have been executed. One researcher found 23 innocent people have been executed in the U.S. since 1900. Since 1973, 82 people have been released from death row when new evidence of their innocence came to light. The obvious and grim finality of the death penalty allows no room for or margin of error, a mistake-free standard few us could honestly meet.

There is evidence to suggest that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime. In fact, a survey of police chiefs in 1995 found that most don't believe the death penalty is an effective law enforcement tool. In addition, the South has the nation's highest murder rate, yet 80 percent of death sentences are carried out there. The Northeast, with less than 1 percent of the nation's executions, also enjoys the lowest murder rate of any region.

But perhaps these problems could be solved, and the death penalty applied fairly to all, with guarantees that no innocent person be deprived of their life. Would the death penalty still be wrong? I think so.

It is tempting to respond to violence with violence, and call it justice. When I first heard of the evil deeds of Henderson and McKinney, or the three men who dragged James Byrd to his death in Texas, or of the white supremacists accused of killing an African immigrant in Denver, I wanted to respond with violence. Nothing would please me more, I thought, than to take a few swings at McKinney or Henderson, and perhaps have a bit more of a fair fight than what took place in Laramie.

But that doesn't seem to be the answer. Violence is the problem, not the solution. Responding to the surge of blood thirst that must have seized Henderson and McKinney with more of the same may satisfy a primal urge to gouge the eye of the one who gouged yours, but it gets us nowhere. Society should not sanction violence in any event, either by any of its members or by enlisting in the state the power to take life.

To me, justice is served best when it seeks not only to punish, but to guide us to the future. If we are ever to get past the violent rages that lead to such tragic deaths as Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, we must start with ourselves and our government, and say that violence is never appropriate as an avenue for settling a score. As Judy Shepard said in asking that the state spare Aaron McKinney's life, we will show tolerance where you showed none. I can't think of a more powerful message than that in arguing against the death penalty. We won't condemn the act of killing by killing again.

Pro-Death Penalty

by Adam Williams

Should we as a civilized society execute criminals? Not all criminals, not all crimes, and surely, only when the chance of innocence has been thoroughly exhausted.

However, there are crimes which warrant execution. These are the crimes which rock society to it's core, horrify us all, and beg the question, "why should this individual go on living?" Kidnapping, robbing, and subsequently pistol-whipping a fellow human being into a coma, then hanging him to die on a fence is, in my mind, a crime deserving death. As seemingly noble as it was for Matthew Shepherd's mother to turn her cheek and seek punishment besides execution for Aaron McKinney, I believe his crime was so beastly in nature, that execution would have been the just punishment. Perhaps Matthew Shepherd's mother sees what many people do in the death penalty: two wrongs.

But I do not see the total removal of an individual capable of unleashing such violence and hatred as wrong.

We all have biases. And deep down I suspect we all have a little bit of hate within us. This does not mean we can act upon these biases and hates. I temper my hatred for hicks who refer to gay men as faggots. I certainly don't think to myself "Hmmm, I think I'll call up a friend, get really cranked on metamphetamines, go mislead some guy at Hooters, and then beat him into a bloody pulp because I grew up gay in a straight world." It just wouldn't fly. If I chose to do this, I hope someone would have the sense to execute me.

I do not believe that we as a society will benefit by having Mr. McKinney reflecting on his life or his crime, in some jail cell for the next 50 years; I could be wrong though, there could be a great book about "Gay Rage" coming down the pike. I do not believe that a society which is willing to remove an individual like Aaron McKinney is a bad society. Quite frankly, I think execution is philosophically sound, and that there are crimes which deserve this punishment.

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News Briefs

Equality Colorado receives funding from OUT Fund for Gay and Lesbian Liberation.

Equality Colorado is proud to have received a small grant from the prestigious OUT Fund for Gay and Lesbian Liberation. The OUT Fund is a National Grant Program of the Funding Exchange. The Funding Exchange is a national network of locally and regionally based foundations that focus on funding those organizations that have committed to long-term social justice work.

The grant will be used toward general operating expenses of Equality Colorado, as well as assisting in our advocacy efforts. Our thanks to the OUT Fund and to the Funding Exchange for recognizing the work of Equality Colorado

Agency Off Record Submits Posters for HALO Awards

Agency Off Record (AOR) submitted the Stop the Violence Campaign posters and last election seasons get out the vote posters that they design for Equality Colorado for the HALO Awards. The HALO Awards acknowledge outstanding graphic art that design agencies create for non-profits or that is done on a pro-bono basis.

Benefiting from Community Shares

Equality Colorado will benefit from generous gifts Colorado employees pledged for non-profit organizations through their workplace giving campaigns through Community Shares. Over $820,000 was pledged to non-profit organizations last year shattering previous records.

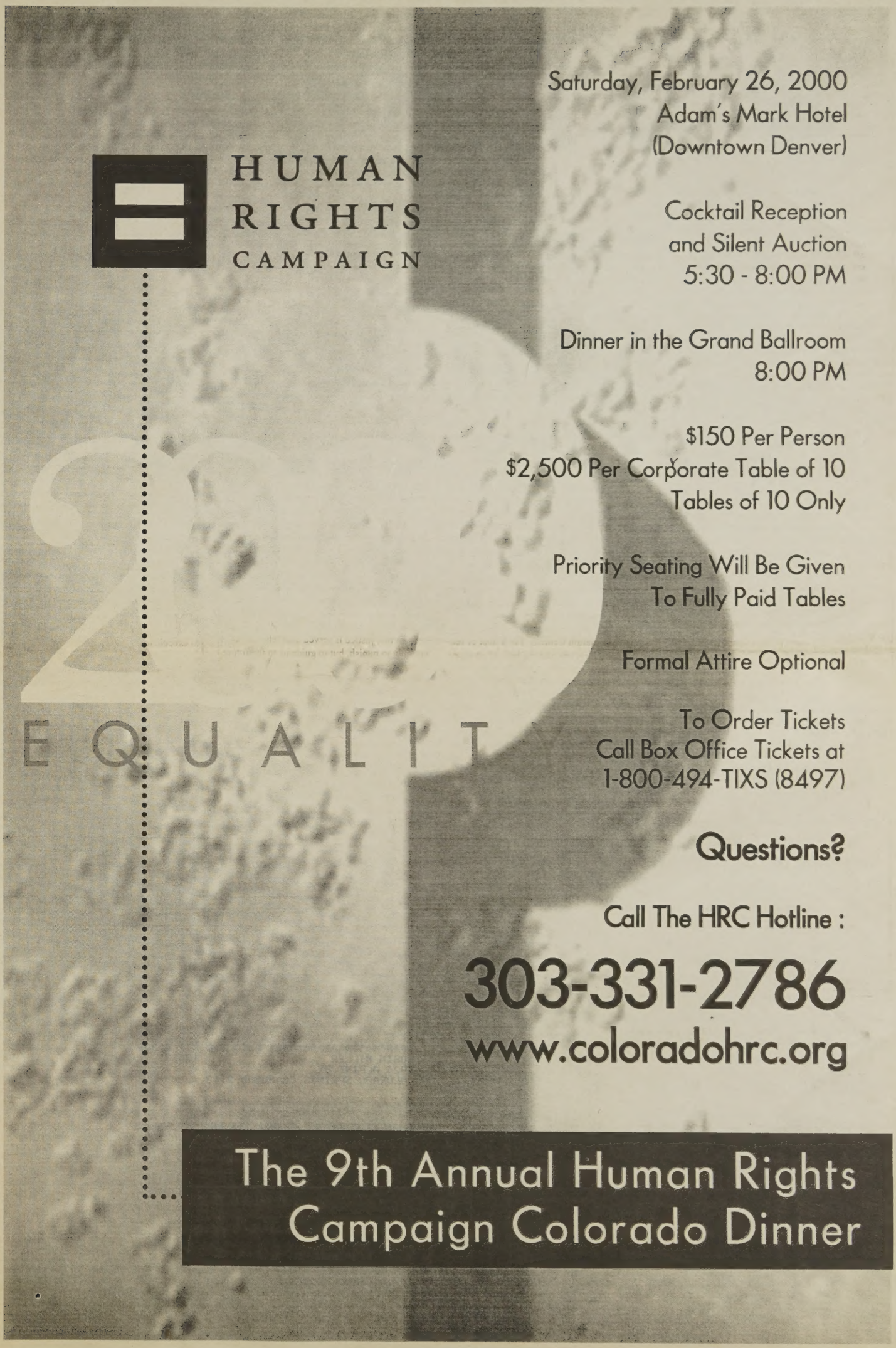
Community Shares is a cooperative of 86 Colorado non-profits, including Equality Colorado, who work together to raise money through payroll deductions. The more individuals we have pledging money to Equality Colorado, the more effective our work can be. If your company does not have payroll deduction, Community Shares can set up an access presentation to open your workplace. You will then have the opportunity to designate a monthly withdrawal gift to Equality Colorado. To receive more info, please contact Jeannette Galanis at 303-839-5540.

Local Ordinances

On November 2, voters in Greeley were able to vote on a broad-based anti-discrimination ordinance for the first time in the city's history. Second Mondays and Concerned Citizens for Human Rights, gathered over 916 signatures to get the issue on this November's ballot. Those working on the issue believed that it was necessary in order to set a tone of acceptance for the entire community and to give quick, local remedies for instances of discrimination. Unfortunately, despite the efforts that included LGBT activists and the Latino community, the ordinance was voted down.

In Boulder, trans activists are close to completing their efforts in getting gender variance added to the Boulder anti-discrimination ordinance. Boulder's ordinance already includes sexual orientation. By adding gender variance, activists and members of the Human Relations Commission, hope to put an end to the discrimination faced by transgender individuals. City Attorney, Joseph de Raismes, discussed at length the pros and cons of various ordinances in the country that have attempted to protect the trans community. It appears that the ordinance will be passed by the city council in the very near future.

Denver activists have been working on putting forth a Committed Partnership Registry to the Denver City Council. The registry would provide recognition and validity for couples in committed relationships. It would provide objective criteria and a formal mechanism to document those relationships. Equality Colorado has been working in partnership the CLIP, the Colorado Parity Coalition, the Colorado Steering Committee of the Human Rights Campaign, the Center, the Gender Identity Center, the Mayor's Gay and Lesbian Advisory Committee and PFLAG on this issue. Denver City Council should be voting on the issue in a few weeks.



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